

## **REPORT TO COUNCIL**

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Report of: Strategic Director, Place

Title: Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub

### **Is this a Key Decision?**

Yes

### **Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Council

## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement to allocate a budget to deliver the redevelopment and refurbishment of Wonford Community and Leisure Centre into a new integrated Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub
- 1.2 Working in partnership with Sport England, the Council is seeking to enter into an Exchequer Funding Agreement (EFA) to secure a £2million grant award from the Sport England's Place Capital Investment programme, to form part of the overall funding package of £6,000,000.
- 1.3 The report provides an update on progress to redevelop and refurbish the existing Wonford Sports Centre and Community and Learning Centre, including the demolition of the existing gym, Phoenix Centre and Outdoor changing rooms and construction of a new hub and FA changing facilities. The new Hub will accommodate a cafe area, changing facilities, studio and gym.

## **2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That Council resolve to:
  - (1) To allocate a budget of £6,000,000 to fund the redevelopment and refurbishment of the Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub funded by: Sport England contribution of £2,000,000; ECC CIL up to £2,920,269; ECC s106 agreements of up to £1,079,731
  - (2) Delegate responsibility to the Strategic Director Corporate Resources in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director of Place to enter into the Exchequer Funding Agreement with Sport England for their £2,000,000 capital investment award to Exeter City Council for the scheme
  - (3) Delegate responsibility to the Strategic Director Corporate Resources in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director of Place to agree new leases with Devon County Council and Wonford Community Centre Trustees, as required in relation to the existing premises at Wonford Community Centre.

### **3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

3.1 The Council has worked in partnership with Sport England since 2018 to deliver the Place Partnership programme. The Wonford Community Hub programme has been a flagship element of this partnership led by the Live and Move team within Exeter City Council.

3.2 Sport England has committed £2,000,000 in principle to the project. The funding contribution from Sport England is time limited, with a condition of award for Exeter City Council to confirm full capital funding for the scheme by May 2026.

3.3 Wonford is a neighbourhood in Exeter that experiences some of the poorest health outcomes, and the highest levels of inactivity.

3.4 The benefits to the Council, communities and residents include:

- Delivering on Exeter City Council's Live and Move Strategy to reduce health inequalities, tackle inactivity, increase physical activity and connect communities.
- Delivering on Exeter City Council's Playing Pitch Strategy and Facilities Planning Modelling. This identifies priorities to develop Community Sports Hubs and protect the supply of sports halls in the city.
- Meeting the aspirations of the local community through extensive local engagement and design to:
  - Provide and improve community wellbeing spaces
  - Connecting the indoor facility to the outdoor space in Wonford and the wider Ludwell Valley
  - Potential for broader community use to improve health outcomes through accessing leisure and community activities
- This programme meets the local planning obligation to reinvest developer contributions into community infrastructure supports health, wellbeing, and active lifestyles outcomes of the Corporate Plan.

### **4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:**

4.1 The £6 million funding package is comprised of funding contributions as follows:

- £2,000,000 grant award from the Sport England's Place Capital Investment programme;
- £1,079,731 Section 106 funding; and
- Up to £2, 920,269 CIL funding.

4.2 The ongoing business case is being developed in detail to mitigate the current annual deficit incurred by the centre.

4.3 Supporting the long-term sustainability of the centre as one building rather than three separate entities.

4.4 Internal resource and expertise to support the Wonford Community Centre Trustees to develop a long-term sustainable business model for their activities

4.5 Internal resource is required to undertake negotiations with the tenants to secure agreement.

## **5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

5.1 This is a potential opportunity to remove the annual deficit at the Wonford Leisure Centre.

5.2 From year one the deficit should reduce significantly from the current subsidy and this will have a positive impact on the General Fund. Crucial to this is the use of CIL to avoid the costs of borrowing.

## **6. What are the legal aspects?**

6.1 The budget requested includes funding from contributions received by the Council under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the application of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Allocation of the section 106 contributions must be in accordance with the terms of the section 106 agreements. Section 216 of the Planning Act 2008 places charging authorities under a duty to apply Community Infrastructure Levy funds to "funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure". This duty is restated in Regulation 59 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (the "Regulations") which requires a charging authority to "apply CIL to funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure to support the development of its area". The project meets the legislative criteria for the application of funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Wonford Integrated Health and Wellbeing Hub is included in the Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement published in December 2025.

6.2 The Exchequer Funding Agreement provided by Sport England sets out the standard terms and conditions for the award of £2 million pounds grant funding which are non-negotiable. The Agreement contains detailed provisions that the Council must comply with to ensure the delivery of the project in accordance with specified timescales, the project purpose and the business plan. Sport England's investment is also secured by entering a Deed of Dedication to register a restriction on the freehold title of the project site for a period of 25 years. The restriction means that for the duration of the 25-year period Sport England's consent will be required to use the project site and the new facility for any purpose that is not within the scope of the project.

6.3 The project site is also subject to the existing occupational leases specified at paragraph 10. These will have to be terminated to proceed with the project.

## 7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 Members will particularly note the legal aspects at paragraph 6. The Monitoring Officer has no additional comments.

## 8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

8.1 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equality Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

The programme will seek to achieve a positive impact for residents within protected characteristics groups. The overall project seeks to reduce inequalities and improve physical and mental wellbeing.

## 9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 The Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub improvement programme will enhance the local environmental and sustainability credentials primarily through:

- An integrated approach to delivering the facilities and services needed by the local community in Wonford for wellbeing, sport and physical activity provision, particularly where it leads to the renewal of previously developed land
- The development considers the impact of climate change in the newbuild element and aims to reduce the buildings carbon emissions
- The development presents an opportunity to create a "gateway" into the park by opening the building to views of the park and remodelling the landscape to connect the north of the site to the Green Circle. This design approach enhances the park, achieving a balance between conservation, recreation, and public access.
- A detailed Energy and Sustainability Strategy (available via the planning portal)
- Additional Solar PV on the Leisure Centre roof
- High efficiency services will be employed in the newbuild element of the site development

9.2 The full Environmental and Biodiversity Net Gain can be found on the Council planning portal as part of the full planning application for the scheme - [24/1396/ECC | Refurbishment of the existing Wonford Sports Centre and Community and Learning Centre, including the demolition of the existing gym, Phoenix Centre and Outdoor changing rooms and construction of a new hub and FA changing facilities. The new Hub will accommodate a cafe area, changing facilities, studio and gym. | Wonford Community And Learning Centre Burnthouse Lane Exeter EX2 6NF](#)

## 10. Report details:

**Background**

- 10.1 Situated in the centre of Exeter, the existing Wonford Leisure Centre, Community Centre and Youth Centre provide a range of social, physical and educational activities supporting residents from across centre.
- 10.2 Built in the 1980s, the Leisure Centre includes a 40 Station Gym, Heavy Weights 'Pump Room', Indoor Cycling Studio, 4 Court Sports Hall and a Floodlit 5-a-side AstroTurf Pitch. The Community Centre has a large hall, a kitchen delivering a community cafe, two meeting rooms and an outdoor patio space towards the playing fields and Ludwell Valley. The former Devon County Council commissioned Youth Centre has a variety of smaller bookable meeting rooms and a small kitchen.
- 10.3 The Leisure Centre forms an integral part of the Exeter Leisure Offer, providing a sports hall space popular for Badminton, Netball and informal Football.
- 10.4 The Community Centre is owned by the Council and leased to, and managed by, the Wonford Community and Learning Centre Trustees and provides a broad range of activities for residents, community groups and charities. The Youth Centre is leased to Devon County Council who in turn lease the space to the Wonford Community and Learning Centre Trustees
- 10.5 The Centre sits in the heart of Wonford adjacent to a nearby Lidl supermarket, Wonford Green PR Surgery and the local Pharmacy.
- 10.6 In February 2022 Council carried the recommendation to approve the provision of £750,000 funding to progress the design and development of Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub which included undertaking of detailed investigations / surveys of the building and the development of the building design, finishes, services, civil and structural designs all for submission of a planning application.
- 10.7 In February 2025, following extensive community engagement and extensive project design works planning permission was granted for a new Wonford Community Hub, costing £7.35million. Ref: Application No24/1396/ECC [| Refurbishment of the existing Wonford Sports Centre and Community and Learning Centre, including the demolition of the existing gym, Phoenix Centre and Outdoor changing rooms and construction of a new hub and FA changing facilities. The new Hub will accommodate a cafe area, changing facilities, studio and gym. | Wonford Community and Learning Centre Burnthouse Lane Exeter EX2 6NF](#)
- 10.8 In April 2025 Exeter City Council was provisionally awarded £2million from Sport England, subject to approving an Exchequer Funding Agreement and delivering against several conditions associated with the award. The Council was eligible for the Sport England Place investment fund due to the long-standing Place Partnership work starting in 2018. The funding contribution from Sport England is time limited, with a condition for Exeter City Council to confirm full capital funding for the scheme by May 2026.

### **Value Engineering**

- 10.9 In June 2025 a process was undertaken to review options for a building that provided a reduced capital cost through a Value Engineering exercise.

- 10.10 The Value Engineering process identified a Phasing Option and five Redesigned Options all costed between £4.75million and £7.6million
- 10.11 These options were developed by the project team and reviewed by Sport England's technical consultants. Two options considered were deemed supportable by Sport England, including Option 1, which had the least capital cost, c. £5.35-£5.68million. The options can be reviewed in detail in the Value Engineering Report at Appendix A
- 10.12 The facility mix is as follows, and the high-level designs can be viewed below:

- 4 Courts Sports Hall
- Sports Hall Store
- Sport Wheelchair Store
- Gym (240m<sup>2</sup>, 53 stations)
- Consultation room
- Studio (75m<sup>2</sup>)
- Male & Female dry change
- Private change
- Changing Places
- Acc. Change
- Acc. WC
- Café (120m<sup>2</sup>) & associated kitchen
- Community Hall
- 2 x meeting rooms
- Community kitchen
- Office
- Staff room
- FA changing rooms



View from Car Park onto new build section, existing community centre and integrated reception



Internal view of cafe community hub area



10.13 From October 2025 the project and design team has been working on the revised RIBA Stage 3 and RIBA Stage 4 processes of the scheme. The following documents are currently in development and will be submitted as part of the evidence required to submit a Non Material Amendment application for the revised scheme:

- Detailed RIBA Stage 3 designs
- Detailed RIBA Stage 3 detailed capital cost analysis
- Procurement Strategy
- Revised detailed business case
- Revised risk register
- Revised EQIA

## Programme

10.14 The following programme is proposed should Members agree to the budget allocation. This shows contractor procurement in late summer 2026, starting on site in February 2027 with testing and completion in summer 2028. To meet the conditions within the Sport England EFA adhering to this programme is critical.

<b>RIBA Stage 3 design and costings</b>	<b>Ongoing January – March 2026</b>
<b>Planning Amendment submission</b>	March 2026
<b>Planning Approval</b>	April 2026
<b>ECC Programme and Funding Approval at Council</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> March 2026
<b>RIBA Stage 3 ECC sign off</b>	w/c 6 <sup>th</sup> April 2026
<b>Sport England EFA agreed</b>	e/o April 2026
<b>RIBA Stage 4 Development</b>	April – July 2026
<b>RIBA Stage 4 ECC sign off</b>	w/c 3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2026
<b>Procurement: Tender development</b>	e/o June 2026
<b>ECC Tender documents sign off</b>	e/o July 2026
<b>Tender Period</b>	August – September 2026
<b>Evaluation, Award and Contracting</b>	October 2026
<b>Contractor appointment</b>	Mid November 2026
<b>Contract Mobilisation</b>	December – January 2026/27
<b>Start on Site</b>	February 2027
<b>Construction Period</b>	February 2027 – May 2028
<b>Testing and handover</b>	June 2028
<b>Completion</b>	July 2028

## Funding

10.15 The programme funding position is highlighted below:

Income	
<b>Sport England (subject to EFA)</b>	£2,000,000
<b>ECC S106</b>	£1,079,731
<b>ECC CIL</b>	£2, 920,269
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£6,000,000</b>
<b>Cost</b>	£5,680,000
<b>Contingency</b>	£320,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£6,000,000</b>

10.16 A Sport England Exchequer Funding Agreement (draft attached at Appendix B) has been issued to ECC for £2million subject to conditions.

10.17 The Sport England funding is committed (subject to the EFA approval) across financial years 26/27 and 27/28 and the Council can draw down this funding, subject to adhering to the EFA award conditions

10.18 Section 106 receipts that fall within the distance and typology range of the Wonford project reach a total of £1,079,931. Section 106 (S106) contributions are legal obligations linked to planning permissions, requiring developers to provide funding or works to mitigate the impact of their development. Each agreement specifies how and when the contribution must be used, and the Council ensures it is spent in line with those requirements.

10.19 Developer contributions should be used to maximum strategic effect and in a timely manner. The Council monitors S106 funding for compliance with specific trigger points, spend deadlines, and purpose as defined in each S106 agreement.

10.20 Projected CIL covering the programme period could be calculated and made available, to offset borrowing. The Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub has been identified as a high priority for investment into community infrastructure

10.21 In terms of the revenue position, a detailed review of existing incomes and costs (for the Community Centre & Leisure Centre operations), and consideration of these within the context of the new Hub (including new facilities, larger gym, etc) has resulted in the forecast first 5 years revenue position of the new hub being:

Build Year 27/28	Year 1 28/29	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>Operating Position</b>	-£105k	-£34k	-£34k	-£25k	£18k

10.22 This compares with a current combined revenue position for the Leisure Centre and Community Centre of circa £275,000 deficit per annum.

### **Lease Position**

10.23 Wonford Community and Leisure Centre is subject to four occupational leases:

- A secure lease to Devon County Council of the Phoenix Centre (youth club) for a term of 125 years expiring 2 May 2113. Devon County Council then sublet this accommodation to Wonford Community & Learning Centre.
- A secure lease to Wonford Community & Learning Centre of the Community Centre for a term of 30 years expiring 30 November 2036.
- A contracted-out lease to Exeter Community Energy of the community centre roof and airspace for a term of 20 years expiring 1 November 2035 for the provision of solar panels and a power purchase agreement to the community centre.

10.24 Negotiations will need to be entered into with the tenants to surrender these leases to secure vacant possession enabling the demolition and construction works to commence.

10.25 Alongside the lease surrender negotiations, Council Officers will work closely with Wonford Community & Learning Centre trustees to design the future management governance model across the whole community hub site. To date, discussions have evolved around a hybrid management structure which includes senior representatives from the leisure service, trustees of the community centre, local members and residents. Detailed work will continue in the spring and summer to finalise proposed governance arrangements alongside a new lease and agreed business planning. Wonford Community & Learning Centre trustees are being supported to develop current business planning and creating a sustainable business case for the future.

## **11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?**

11.1 The Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub delivers significant benefit towards the Council corporate plan and priorities as set out below:

- Delivering on Exeter City Council's Live and Move Strategy to reduce health inequalities, tackle inactivity, increase physical activity and connect communities.

- Delivering on Exeter City Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy and Built Facilities Planning Modelling. This identifies priorities to develop Community Sports Hubs and protect the supply of sports halls in the city.
- Meeting the aspirations of the local community through extensive local engagement and design to:
  - Provide and improve community wellbeing spaces
  - Connecting the indoor facility to the outdoor space in Wonford and the wider Ludwell Valley
  - Potential for broader community use to improve health outcomes through accessing leisure and community activities
- This programme meets the local planning obligation to reinvest developer contributions into community infrastructure supports health, wellbeing, and active lifestyles outcomes of the Corporate Plan.
  
- The project significantly delivers against the Council priority for ‘People’ and will:
  - Aim to reduce health inequalities through participation in sport and physical activity.
  - Support communities to be more healthy, resilient and connect with one another.
  - Enable more residents, including those from our priority neighbourhoods and communities, will be participating in leisure and cultural events and activities.
  - Support a safe and thriving city with great things to see and do for everyone.

## 12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

12.1 The key risks are highlighted below:

Risk	Mitigation Strategy
Revisions to Lease Agreement	Ensure adequate programme time. ECC Commercial Assets Team to engage with DCC and Trustees. Outline position to be established and negotiations to be taken forward.
Protracted Middle East War causing material price increase.	Early engagement with contractor/supply chain. Substitute materials/products susceptible to price increases.
Funding to be allocated March 2026	Proposal to Extraordinary Council on 24/3/26 to finalise funding approval.
Reduced project scope following value engineering exercise	Ongoing communication with Stakeholders in place with Exeter Leisure, Wonford Trustees and other interested parties.
Business Case validity	Review Business case at each stage. Revised business case under development, commissioning leisure/community consultant expertise to refine modelling/revenue position

12.2 Currently there is no certainty on securing vacant possession of the leased areas; this is to be negotiated in the next phase of the project. Additionally, the cost to surrender the existing occupational leases is currently unknown.

- 12.3 The timeframe for obtaining vacant possession is critical to the project; the terms for the lease surrenders need to be agreed before the tender process commences in August, with agreements being documented before the construction contract is let in October/November. Construction contracts must not be signed until there is a clear route to obtaining vacant possession; to do otherwise would represent a significant risk to the Council.
- 12.4 There is no current certainty on the future operating model for the Wellbeing Hub. The future operating model should seek to maximise possibilities for income generation, layout clear routes for managing utilisation of the facility, consolidate disparate repair obligations, service charge and demise issues. When there is resolution on the preferred operating model, heads of terms for any new leases can be agreed and documented.

### **13. Are there any other options?**

- 13.1 If the Council does not agree a budget for the scheme, it is likely the £2,000,000 Sport England Exchequer funding agreement will be withdrawn.
- 13.2 The alternative is for the building to remain as it is and continue to have a significant annual deficit on the Council leisure budget and ongoing capital maintenance and repairs. Without significant investment the building in time would have to close and cease its services.

#### **Director: Strategic Director, Place**

Author: Place Partnership Manager, Live & Move

### **14. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None

List of Appendices: